

Homeland Defense: The Pennsylvania State Guard, 1941-1953

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ON 8 OCTOBER 2001, less than a month after the terrorist attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush created the Office of Homeland Security (now the Department of Homeland Security), with former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge as director. Homeland defense or homeland security is not a new concept. After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the fall of France in June 1940, the U.S. military mobilized for World War II.¹

Beginning in 1940 and continuing through 1942, most U.S. Army National Guard (ARNG) and Army Reserve (USAR) units, including infantry divisions (IDs), were activated. The ARNG was federalized, sent to various mobilization training installations, and eventually deployed overseas, forming the core of the Army that fought and won World War II.

When the ARNG—the traditional state ready-reaction force—went to war, the obvious need arose for a trained force to replace it. In 1940, Congress amended the National Defense Act to allow governors to raise such a force.² All but a few states raised and equipped units to take the place of deployed ARNG and USAR units.

The new units consisted of World War I veterans, men awaiting active service, and others, who for one reason or another were exempt from active service.³ Training schedules were much the same as for the ARNG. The units participated in drills once a week, usually on Monday nights, and held an annual training period one week each summer. Doctrine came from standard Army manuals. Soldiers were not paid for the weekly drill, but they received full pay and allowances for the annual training period and for any state active-duty time.⁴

The units guarded bridges, munitions, tank factories, and other key installations, and they received training on defending against air attacks, saboteurs, and guerrillas and dealing with civil disturbances and disasters.

Pennsylvania Reserve Defense Corps

On 20 March 1941, Pennsylvania's adjutant general issued General Order No. 1 which officially recognized and organized the Pennsylvania Reserve Defense Corps (PRDC) as a brigade-size (1,934 man) force of three regiments.⁵ The 1st regiment, based in Philadelphia, covered the eastern sector of the state. The 2d regiment, based in Wilkes-Barre, covered the central sector. The 3d regiment, based in Pittsburgh, covered the western sector.

Divided into three battalions with three rifle companies per battalion, each regiment had a regimental headquarters and a service company with a medical detachment. Each company contained two platoons with approximately 30 men per platoon. With the exception of two platoons instead of three per company, the Tables of Organization and Equipment (TOE) resembled the standard Army TOE of the day for commissioned and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and enlisted personnel.

The rank structure for the officer, NCO, and enlisted ranks resembled that of an Army separate infantry brigade, with a brigadier general as brigade commander, two additional colonels at the brigade headquarters, and a colonel commanding each regiment. The remaining brigade officer strength consisted of 5 lieutenant colonels, 17 majors, 49 captains, 72 1st lieutenants, and 62 2d lieutenants. All enlisted members, ranging in age from 21 to 50, received a physical examination.

To optimize the available prior-service manpower pool, there was no age limit for officers.⁶ General Robert M. Vail, the first brigade commander, had entered the Pennsylvania ARNG on 16 March 1894 as a private. His career included service in the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Philippines Insurrection from 1899 to 1904, the Mexican Border Expedition from 1916 to 1917, and World War I from 1917 to 1918. Vail received the Distinguished Service

Cross and Purple Heart for heroism and wounds received in France during World War I. He served in the Pennsylvania ARNG until his retirement in 1939 as a major general.⁷

Although Vail retired as a major general, when he returned to active state service as commander of the Pennsylvania State Guard and acting adjutant general, he reverted to his last permanent rank held—brigadier general. Taking such a reduction in rank to continue in the service of the country spoke well of Vail's patriotism.

The governor provided uniforms, equipment, and supplies to the new units. Initial-issue uniforms resembled those of the Pennsylvania State Police, including campaign hats like those worn by Army drill sergeants, and blue-and-gray blouses, trousers, shirts, and ties. The shoulder insignia was a blue felt patch with the white letters "RDC" (Reserve Defense Corps) in the center.

Where available, units received small arms and ammunition, including World War I-issue M1903 Springfield bolt-action rifles and Reising submachineguns. Officers were responsible for obtaining their own side arms and ammunition. As the war progressed and supplies became more plentiful, units received upgraded equipment and weapons.⁸

Active service for the state brigade was not long in coming. The Adjutant General's General Order No. 2, dated 8 December 1941—the day after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor—placed the entire brigade on state active duty for 3 weeks.⁹ The regiments' duty assignments included guarding bridges in their respective sectors.

The Brigade Headquarters Company was responsible for the 24-hour safety of the state airport at Marsh Run and 24-hour roving patrols of the bridges spanning the Susquehanna River at Harrisburg. E Company of the 2d Regiment was responsible for covering the Clarks Ferry Bridge and the Juniata crossing and maintaining night security on the state arsenal at Harrisburg.¹⁰

As the emergency of December 1941 and January 1942 subsided, the brigade returned to its normal status of drill periods 1 night a week plus the 1-week annual training period and continued this schedule throughout the war. In 1943, the PRDC was renamed the Pennsylvania State Guard. The Guard served the state from 1941 to 1948, and the final units were deactivated as the 28th ID was re-



constituted after campaigning in the European Theater of Operations and returned to state control.

Peak strength for the Pennsylvania State Guard during World War II was approximately 5,700 officers and enlisted soldiers. Because of increased strength and reorganization, the brigade grew from three regiments (the 1st, 2d, and 3d) to five (the 1st, 2d, 4th, 10th, and 16th), one cavalry squadron (the 1st Cavalry Squadron), a separate mechanized cavalry troop (C Troop, 1st Cavalry Squadron), and one engineer battalion (the 1st Engineer Battalion).¹¹

Although they never participated in combat operations, these mostly volunteer units were instrumental in providing homeland security during World War II. For three critical weeks following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the brigade filled the void left by deploying ARNG and USAR units and performed the local security mission superbly. By functioning as an additional armed force, they freed up personnel for other areas of the war effort. The state guard also served as an unofficial NCO training ground. Those who had previously served attained NCO rank more quickly than did those with no prior service experience.¹²

Korean War Call-up

During the post-World War II period, most ARNG units had returned to state control and resumed their prewar roles as America's second line of defense and as state ready-reaction forces. All but a few units of the temporary homeland-security force were disbanded. The need to back up the ARNG with state security forces came up again later, however, when in a surprise move, communist North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel in June 1950 and

invaded democratic South Korea. U.S. forces were quickly mobilized. Units of the Japan Occupation Force, such as the 24th and 25th IDs and the 1st Cavalry Division, were immediately deployed because of their location near Korea. As the mobilization expanded, other European- and U.S.-based units were quickly trained and sent in theater.

While the U.S. response to North Korean aggression was immediate, it was of lesser magnitude than that of World War II. Nonetheless, President Harry S. Truman authorized a Presidential Selected Reserve Call-up of ARNG and USAR units. Some were sent to Korea; others were used as backfills for European-based units sent into the Korean theater. In total, 8 ARNG infantry divisions, 3 regimental combat teams, and 714 company-size units were called up. This caused internal security problems for some states such as Pennsylvania.¹³

In the fall of 1950, the 28th ID of the Pennsylvania ARNG was called to active duty for occupation duty in Germany. In response, Pennsylvania Governor James H. Duff ordered the reorganization and reactivation of the Pennsylvania State Guard to replace the 28th ID during its absence.

During the Korean war, the Pennsylvania State Guard's make up was similar to the World War II model, with some key differences. The similarities included the following:

- Of the major units formed, infantry was the predominant branch (four regiments).
- Each regiment was responsible for a geographic location within the state (the 10th and the 16th covered western Pennsylvania; the 13th covered northeastern Pennsylvania; and the 4th covered the central region).
- Regimental commanders were chosen from combat veterans.
- The state adjutant general was commander of the unit.
- Most missions were identical to World War II security duties.

The differences included the following:

- The entire force operated as a division rather than as a brigade.
- All line officers were chosen from World War II veterans who had seen service overseas.
- The TOE resembled that of a division rather than that of a brigade with additional combat support and combat service support subordinate units.
- An additional mission was to defend the local populace from enemy poison-gas attacks.

The adjutant general stipulated that regimental commanders would be chosen from former World War II combat veterans, and company grade officers had to have had overseas service. While this edict was not designed to discriminate against vol-

unteers who did not fit either category, it was clear that prior overseas, and especially overseas combat experience, was highly desirable for leaders.¹⁴ With the unit containing an overwhelming number of experienced personnel, the Pennsylvania State Guard ably performed its duties as a replacement for the federalized ARNG.

Other State Guards

The proud tradition of volunteer service continues today. Approximately 22 states and Puerto Rico have state guard units, more commonly referred to as State Defense Forces (SDF). New York's SDF, which also has naval militia and Marine Corps elements, supplied much needed manpower following the 11 September 2001 attacks. Both SDF and state naval militia forces had been activated.

State Defense Forces have a proud history of service. Many trace their lineage to the colonial militia. The militia participated in campaigns ranging from protecting their homes from Indian attacks, to major theater wars, to internal security missions.

While times have changed, force requirements have not. With the new menace of terrorism and the likelihood of increased overseas campaigns for AC and RC forces, the use of SDF forces for internal state security missions is certainly worth study. In about half the states and some territories, SDF units operate with little fanfare on shoestring budgets. Yet they accomplish many of the same missions their predecessors did during World Wars I and II, the Korean war, and more recent crises. The foundation for a useful homeland defense force is already in place, so why not build on it? **MR**

NOTES

1. This article is adapted from the original published by the U.S. Freedom Foundation, Warrenton, Virginia. See on-line at <www.freedomfoundation.us/state_defense_forces1>, accessed 26 March 2004.

2. U.S. Code, Title 50 Appendix, "War and National Defense Act" (Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act), 17 October 1940, CH. 888, 54 STAT. 1178. See on-line at <www.operationhomefront.org/complete%20sscrs.htm>, accessed 24 March 2004. See also <www.dod.mil/specials/Relief_Act_Revision/>, accessed 24 March 2004.

3. Barry M. Stentiford, *The American Home Guard: The State Militia in the Twentieth Century* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 93-94.

4. LTC Brent C. Bankus, "The Pennsylvania State Guard During World War II," *The Press Enterprise*, 30 November 2002, 15.

5. The Adjutant General Report of Pennsylvania, General Order (GO) No. 1, 1941, The Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

6. Bankus.

7. The Pennsylvania Archives, *National Guardsman* (October 1953).

8. GO No. 1, 1941.

9. GO No. 2, 1941.

10. GO No. 1.

11. *National Guardsman*.

12. Stentiford.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *National Guardsman*.

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